



The State of the Economy

I recently had the opportunity to reflect publicly on the County's economic success in the State of the Economy address presented before the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce.

The state of our economy is strong, robust and vibrant. Montgomery County remains the economic engine of the State, with the lowest unemployment rate in Maryland and 73,000 jobs created here in the County in the past nine years.

We have the largest concentration of biotech companies of any county in the country. Last year, alone, our biotech sector grew at five times the national rate.

Silver Spring has become a national model for urban renewal, as well as the East Coast's newest and hottest locale for the arts and entertainment industry. Other neighborhoods around the county are in various stages of redevelopment, attracting class A office space and new companies.

We are, indeed, fortunate to have the tax base and economy we do, but it's no miracle. It's the result of vision and hard work on the part of many people. We need to keep doing more, but we can't act alone.

We need to act collectively around the State to invest in and build technology incubators in every county. For instance, we should make all our community colleges' research parks linked and working together.

We need to think globally and tap into the unique advantages of each county for the good not only of our own community but the entire State.

Urging More CNG Buses for Metro

I'm proud of the fact that Montgomery County has been a regional leader in the use of compressed natural gas (CNG) buses as the cleanest alternatively-fueled vehicles available, as we replace the oldest and dirtiest diesel fuel buses in our Ride On fleet.

That's why I recently wrote to Metro Board, urging them to continue their policy of purchasing additional CNG buses in order to help the region achieve its air quality and compliance goals. As newer, cleaner bus options become available, our long-term strategy is to continue to lead the way in adopting even more environmentally friendly technologies.

Opening the Grosvenor Garage

I was pleased to participate in the recent opening of the new parking garage at the Grosvenor-Strathmore Metrorail Station ([link to Press Release](#)). The current demand for parking at Grosvenor-Strathmore has far exceeded the available capacity, but now thanks to this new facility with its 1,500 spaces, we will better meet that demand. Plus, when the new Strathmore Concert Hall opens in February, patrons will have a convenient way to access the venue.

The six-level garage, which was built on part of an existing Metro surface parking lot, increases the available parking at this station by 200 percent. Improving access to transit is one of my highest priorities in our fight to reduce traffic congestion. This facility represents a major step toward meeting that priority.

I think commuters and arts patrons will appreciate the various features, such as customer assistance phones, glass-enclosed stair towers and an open design to enhance visibility and security.

Preserving Farmland and Open Spaces

Montgomery County has been recognized as leading the nation in farmland preservation (*Natural Resource Defense Council*) and I am using the recent release of the 2002 Census of Agriculture to recommit to doing even more to hold that position, despite serious financial obstacles and increasing development pressures.

The Census confirms that our agricultural industry is alive and well. The total value of products has increased by



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\$13 million since 1997 and the total number of people whose principal occupation is farming has also risen from 45 to 50 percent.

We in Montgomery County are extremely proud of the agricultural legacy that has been handed down through generations of farm families. But, cuts in State funding for crucial farm and parkland preservation programs means we must work even harder to ensure that Montgomery County continues to be a national model for agricultural and park lands. At stake is the future for our environment, our farmers and an enhanced quality of life for all our residents.

Promoting Pedestrian Safety

We've made progress in raising the awareness of pedestrian safety among our residents over the past several years by increasing enforcement and undertaking engineering improvements to help reduce pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

The good news is that in the first five months of this year, pedestrian injuries were down 14 percent, compared with the same 5time period last year.

However, we need to work even harder, because the tragic fact is that there have been eight pedestrian fatalities in the first six months of 2004, compared with three in the first six months of 2003.

To date, part of our aggressive approach has been to target drivers who have violated the law. But, I think the time has come to consider other options that will help ensure that pedestrians share the responsibility and determine whether increased pedestrian enforcement against violators will help reduce injuries and deaths.

This is why I have just asked the Montgomery County Police and the County's Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee to look at the issue and present recommendations by the end of the summer.

Meanwhile, I have announced three new pedestrian safety initiatives designed to address the increasing number of incidents ([link to Press Release](#)):

- 1) *Police in Silver Spring will step up enforcement during the summer months targeting pedestrians and traffic law violators;*
- 2) *A "No Right Turn on red" policy has been implemented throughout the Silver Spring Central Business District; and*
- 3) *New and reconstructed traffic signals throughout the County will include pedestrian countdown signals.*

Our goal should be to reduce pedestrian deaths to zero – to prevent further tragedies and spare victims and their families' needless pain and suffering.